ASSESSING THE HOSPITAL BUILDING SUSTAINABILITY: THE EXPERIENCE IN USING QUALITATIVE TOOLS

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ABSTRACT

With the rising worldwide sustainability trends, the healthcare industry is encouraged for philosophical, societal and economic reasons to implement the "greening movement" in its practice. Consequently, this move has resulted in the development of several sustainability certification tools focusing on healthcare settings. Among the best known ones are BREEAM, LEED and Green Guide for Healthcare. Their ease of use, holistic approach and possibility of implementation from the early-design phase, have made them very attractive among different building practitioners. However, their subjectivity in the assessment approach, leaves a doubt whether the use of these schemes leads to truly sustainable buildings. This has led to an increased awareness among architects and urban planners that the qualitative tools to assess the sustainability of their projects are not sufficient. The same questions on the sustainability of hospitals have emerged in the Flemish healthcare sector as well. On-going development of the Duurzaamheidsmeter Zorg, a qualitative tool by the Flemish Infrastructure Fund for Person-related Matters (VIPA) based on BREEAM, aims at helping building practitioners in assessing the sustainability of their hospital projects. However, urban planners and architects who had the opportunity of using it, reported some disadvantages and shortcomings. A need is hence identified to develop a more reliable sustainability assessment method based on a quantitative approach.

As important design decisions taken during the early design phase have a high impact on the life cycle environmental burdens and financial cost of the building, a life cycle assessment (LCA) and life cycle costing (LCC) approach seem to be most appropriate. The challenge is to develop such method to be useful during the early design phase. In order to move towards the aforementioned method, it is important to compare the existing qualitative tools in terms of their weighting criteria as well as their benefits and shortcomings. This paper elaborates the first step in the research analyzing the building professionals' experiences in using sustainability assessment tools, available in Flanders, on hospital facilities during the early design phase. Their feedback is translated into a SWOT analysis which will serve as future indicators in the identification of the professional's expectation from the tools. The results from the architects' feedback and the SWOT analysis identify the professionals' expectations of an assessment method which are seen as valuable directions to consider when developing an evaluation method from a life cycle thinking perspective.